

An unfolding of paul
laurence dunbar's:
we wear the mask
essay



**ASSIGN
BUSTER**

The poem is concealing the pain and suffering as an ex-slave. Paul Laurence Dunbar created this masterpiece of literature around the same time former slaves were seeking civil rights and equality in America. He symbolizes the mask as a smile or grin that covered up the true emotions underlying – the unhappiness, disparity, and hopelessness.

He was effective by using that symbol to denote hope in the midst of the sorrowful journey African American's were on. The writer expresses the optimistic endurance of pain and affliction with the mask that blacks would wear to deceive white people into believing that everything was okay. The mask wearer did not want the world to focus so much on what was really happening on the inside. He wanted to take the focus off of the pain and struggle and divert it towards the hope and strength that was within the individual.

The poem has a deep emotional touch to it, when you understand what the mask represents — freedom, peace, happiness and hope. The hope and perseverance that a former slave possessed would somehow free the soul from the bondage of mental and spiritual chains. The writer perfectly illustrated the mask to make the reader understand that there is one thing that cannot be taken away — hope. As hard as it was to smile in all of the agony and pain that African American's endured on a daily basis, it was done, and so cleverly that no one noticed.

Paul masterfully designed the poem to spark hope and encourage the reader. The African American's would one day overcome oppression. Just because they were without equal rights and liberties, they refused to let that

dictate their joy, happiness and peace. The writer perfectly wrote the poem to trigger an emotional response in the reader by telling him, " We wear the mask that grins and lies, it hides our cheeks and shades our eyes — this debt we pay to human guile; with torn and bleeding hearts we smile. " He carefully disguises the true pain and distress African American's were experiencing at the time by putting on this mask of joy, happiness and contentment.

The mask literally was a huge exaggeration — it was sarcastic and was wore by many of his people at the time to please white people by making them believe that the African Americans were okay with the way they were being mistreated, sadly among themselves as well. Furthermore, the narrator gives us clues to understand that African Americans were fighting to win their civil rights and liberty. It was more than just a physical freedom owed to African Americans, it was civil rights, equality and moral justice they desired. The process of gaining those rights had to be done carefully and quietly.

He hints this to us when he says, " Why should the world be over-wise, in counting all our tears and sighs? Nay, let them only see us, while we wear the mask. " The mask here is clearly evident that the oppressed people were not just going to let the oppressors be satisfied by seeing them hurt, depressed and defeated. This was a war of the mind not of the flesh. The injustice motivated the slave to put on this mask everyday as weapon of illusion.

The mask was to deceive the person seeing it and cause them to think everything they were doing was right in their eyes. This endurance and

resilience to slavery propelled the slave toward the future hope of a better life. This facade was to go on until just the right time - when civil rights and liberty was finally established. In addition, the author illustrates the pain and sorrow that was underlying this mask of happiness and contentment.

He goes on to say, " We smile, but of great Christ, our cries to Thee from tortured souls arise. We sing, but oh the clay is vile beneath our feet, and long the mile, but let the world dream otherwise, we wear the mask! It was undeniably fact that beneath this mask lied a multitude of painful, dreary emotions. Paul gave the world a glimpse of what really goes on underneath the mask here by telling the reader that there is song - a hope and banner of freedom for the oppressed — even travelling on a vile clay. In conclusion, the writer did not want the world to see this plan of hope for the future that his people had by declaring, " But let the world see otherwise, we wear the mask! " As I read this last line I gained a sense of ingenuity derived from the poet.

He explains that the mask was to be wore until equality and liberty was established for all people. By wearing this deceptive mask, the world would be fooled by their own eyes and ultimately be deceived by themselves. While the poem can be read in terms of the struggle by African American for civil rights, nowhere in the poem is the issue mention / consider using this essay for your research paper and developing the topic by setting the discussion firmly in the context of civil rights / see the research paper assignment